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THE POLITICAL SATIRES OF CHARLES CHURCHILL

BY JOSEPH M. BEATTY, JR.

The Anglophobe school histories of a generation or two ago were all too prone to ignore the liberalistic tendencies in England that came to fruition in the American Revolution. They neglected to mention the English opponents of George III; they minimized the activities of American loyalists: according to their accounts, all Americans were revolutionists, all Britons were tyrants. With the less prejudiced study of historical movements, however, has come a careful sifting of the evidence until historians find in 1763 an unsuccessful attempt in England to uphold ideals that became a few years later the foundation stones of the new nation across the sea.

In England, much of the rancour of the opposition party was vented upon the Prime Minister, the Scotch Earl of Bute. The Earl had been one of the chief advisers of the king after the death of his father, the Prince of Wales, and had helped the Princess Dowager to instil into her son's mind the doctrine that a king must rule. Bolingbroke's treatise, *On the Idea of a Patriot King*, and probably Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*—then in manuscript—served as text-books on royal prerogative.

Had Bute been content to let his pupil gain his political theories entirely from these works, all might have been well, but he added to them his own advice, which exaggerated the importance of royal privileges. It was, indeed, not difficult to exaggerate these privileges, for at that time the power of the King of England was at low tide. George I and George II, both foreign-born, were dominated by the Whigs, who had been in power since 1714. The first two Georges had been largely dependent upon this party for advice in the administration of affairs; consequently, great power fell into the hands of a small group of Whig families. During the ministry of Robert Walpole, which extended from 1720 until 1742, the party was split up into various groups attached to the most powerful leaders. The Tories, who were largely identified with the Jacobites, were almost neglected. The suppression of the revolt of '45, however, definitely put an end to the ambition of the Stuarts for the

throne, and their followers became loyal subjects who could not with any degree of justice be kept out of their rightful share in the government. George III did not want to rule by party nor did he want one party to be all-powerful. The Tories would not only support him, but would also help him to destroy the power of the Whigs.

The cabinet in 1760 was "an informal committee of the Privy Council,"¹ in which some five or six men formed a sort of dynamic nucleus for the whole. The men who formed this smaller cabinet discussed the more important state affairs and presented them to the sovereign and the whole cabinet. Immediately upon coming to the throne, George offered Bute the office of secretary of state, but the Scotchman saw that this would show his hand before he was ready to play. The new cabinet consisted, therefore, of Pitt and Holderness, secretaries of state; Lord Henley, the keeper of the seal; Lord Grenville, the president of the council; the Duke of Newcastle, the first lord of the treasury; Lord Hardwicke, the ex-chancellor; Lord Anson, first lord of the admiralty; Lord Ligonier, master general of the ordnance; Lord Mansfield, lord chief-justice; the Duke of Bedford, lord-lieutenant of Ireland; and the Duke of Devonshire, lord chamberlain. One or two other officials might attend to give information about their work. Bute, after a short time, was made groom of the stole, and entered the cabinet. The small inner group gradually expanded to ten or twelve of the most important men in the government.

Of George's first cabinet, by far the most powerful members were the Duke of Newcastle and William Pitt, who coöperated in building up a strong administration. Newcastle had great influence in his party, not only on account of his family, but also on account of his ability as a manager and administrator. He was honest himself, but used corrupt political means to bring about his ends. Pitt was the idol of the people: under his guidance, England was laying the foundations of a great empire in Canada and in India. The king saw that as long as Pitt and Newcastle continued to work together, the Whigs would hold their monopoly of power. He decided, therefore, to try to cause dissension between the two leaders.

¹ Hunt, William, *The History of England*. From the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration. London, N. Y., and Bombay, 1905, p. 7.

Both George and Bute, by slighting Newcastle, made him jealous of Pitt. Bute, although opposed to the great war-minister's views on peace, allied himself with him. The Scotchman wanted to keep England out of continental alliances; Pitt wanted England to be a potent factor in European politics. Bute and many of the Tories maintained that England would be wasting money if she continued to wage a continental war. The king wanted peace at once: it could be secured only by Pitt's overthrow.

In order to obtain a majority in Parliament to carry out his plans, the king spent money lavishly. Formerly, the ministry had named candidates for boroughs belonging to the crown. In 1761 the king named them himself. Newcastle had to submit his list of candidates to Bute for approval. Newly-rich nabobs who had made vast sums in India became candidates for seats in Parliament, and, entirely free from former political connections, were ready to follow the orders of the king. By March, 1761, George III had an obedient Parliament. His next move was to reorganize the ministry.

In January, the Sardinian minister, Count de Viri, one of Bute's friends, had a secret interview with Newcastle in which he suggested that Bute be made a secretary of state. The king consented, and on March 12, in order to make room for Bute, Holderness was dismissed with a pension of £4,000 a year and other rewards. Legge, the chancellor of the exchequer, somewhat recalcitrant in regard to the wishes of Bute and his master, was displaced by Lord Barrington, formerly secretary-at-war, a man ready to do the king's commands. Charles Townshend became secretary-at-war; George Grenville, a follower of Bute, had been admitted to the cabinet about a month before. Such was the personnel of the cabinet when the question of peace reached a crisis.

Pitt, by letters intercepted between Fuentes, the Spanish minister in London, and Grimaldi, the Spanish minister in Paris, saw that Spain was about to enter the war, and that England's only safety lay in attacking Spain at once, before she had completed her naval preparations. Choiseul, the French minister, tried to prolong the negotiations until certain Spanish treasure ships from America should arrive in port.

On September 19, Pitt sent a paper to the council urging that war be declared at once against Spain. The council refused to act upon secret information. On the 21st, Pitt pointed out the

necessity for quick action, but the other members of the council were obdurate. On October 2, the council held a meeting in regard to the orders to be sent to Lord Bristol, British Ambassador at Madrid. Pitt maintained his former attitude toward Spain; the council refused to declare war. Pitt said that "he would not continue without having the direction."² On the 5th of October he resigned from his office.

Upon his resignation, Pitt was given a pension of £3,000 for three lives, and the title of Baroness of Chatham for his wife. At first the people were indignant at his resignation, especially since the announcement in the *Gazette* maliciously coupled his resignation and his pension. When Pitt had explained the reason for his relinquishing the office, his popularity revived, and Bute became an object of obloquy.

The unpopularity of Bute was due, however, not merely to his antagonism to Pitt. His position as royal favorite, even though the favoritism was political rather than personal, exposed him to the hatred of the mob. His name was connected disparagingly with that of the king's mother, and the Jack Boot, which was chosen as his emblem, was frequently placed in juxtaposition with a bonnet or a petticoat.³ Shortly after Pitt's resignation, both Pitt and Bute attended the Lord Mayor's feast. Pitt was loudly cheered by the populace, but Bute had to be rescued by the constables when his coach, guarded by hired bruisers, was attacked by a mob that shouted, "'Damn all Scotch rogues!' 'No Bute!' 'No Newcastle salmon!'"⁴

To the Londoner of the time, the Scotch were known as proud but impoverished place-hunters who were preferred by those in authority. Buckingham palace was nicknamed Holyrood on account of the many Scotchmen who frequented it. The Scotch were usually capable, yet every appointment of Scotchmen to official positions was to the English a fresh cause of suspicion and jealousy. The national hatred that had been fostered at Bannockburn, at Flodden Field, and in innumerable border forays, had been aroused anew by the rebellions of 1715 and 1745. By 1760, however, all

² Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

³ Lecky, W. E. H., *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1878-90, in 8 volumes, vol. III, pp. 49-50.

⁴ Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

fear of Jacobite revolts had passed. In 1762, a writer in *The London Magazine*, probably the editor, remarks, "the jacobite interest at this day is less an object of terror, than of contempt."⁵ Bute's followers came to London in great numbers. The periodicals of the time bristle with allusions to Scotland and its people. One writer, calling himself a "South Briton," says the change in feeling toward the Scotch from friendship to distrust is due to the fact that they want to command rather than to serve England. "All the evils which have happened," he says, "or may happen to this nation; all the civil dissensions [sic], heart-burnings, feuds, and animosities, which now divide this ill-fated country owe their first rise to Scottish influence, and take their date from that hour in which a Scottish nobleman accepted of the first civil post under the king; and owe also their continuance to that influence, which it is suspected still remains."⁶ This outburst naturally provoked a "Briton" to reply, saying that Bute was not entirely to blame, that the French were trying to make the Scotch even more hostile than they really were. He held that it was for errors of administration that Bute was strictly accountable, and not for an accident of birth.⁷ This lack of success was not due to his race, nor was his unpopularity, but his failures tended to make still more hateful to Englishmen, a nation toward which they had an antipathy inherited from many generations.

During the whole controversy over the peace, the writers employed by the government and by the opposition party carried on the quarrel with great bitterness. As early as June 20, 1762, Horace Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann: "The new administration begins tempestuously. My Father was not more abused after twenty years than Lord Bute is in twenty days. Weekly papers swarm, and like other swarms of insects, sting. The cry you may be sure is on his Scot-hood."⁸ The chief of these papers were *The Monitor*, *The Auditor*, *The Briton*, and *The North Briton*. Around *The North Briton*, its owner, John Wilkes, and his co-editor, Charles Churchill, was waged one of the fiercest battles in the political warfare of the period.

⁵ *The London Magazine* for 1762, p. 72.

⁶ *Ibid.* for 1764, p. 413.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 413-415.

⁸ *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford*, edited in 8 volumes, by Peter Cunningham, London, 1857, vol. iv, p. 2.

Much of the controversial literature of the opposition party was simply the voice of the mob. Since in real life the mob delighted in throwing eggs and brickbats at authority, we cannot wonder that they followed similar methods in their controversial writings. The English lower classes, from the days of Wat Tyler, had not, indeed, been lacking in independence of spirit, but during the reign of Tudor and Stuart they had had little opportunity to show their power. The so-called "Age of Reason" may have dwarfed their souls, but it tended to make them refuse to accept doctrines which their reason failed to support. If one man wrote a pamphlet or a satirical poem attacking the deists, another was certain to take issue with him. If the ministry advocated measures offensive to the people they would be assailed immediately by various Lovers of Truth and Friends of Society,⁹ who, if they were powerful enough as writers, would stir up a veritable hornet's nest of controversy. Public characters were fair game. *The Monthly Review*, in its account of *The Fall of Public Spirit: A Dramatic Satire, in two Acts* (1757), sums up quite adequately the attitude of the mob, powerful in its privileges and delighting to pillory the great:

When our Satyrist talks of Prime Ministers, and Nobles, and Ladies of Quality, he seems resolved to give no quarter, well knowing how much we love to see the great folks roasted: abusing a Lord, and pumping a pick-pocket, are the undisputed prerogatives of a British mob.¹⁰

This was written three years before George III came to the throne. It is not surprising that, when the causes for complaint became more serious, the satirist continued to roast the great, and, indeed, not to limit his attack to them. The quarrels waxed more violent, the hatred between parties more keen. The time was ripe for a great satirist who should combine the qualities of a caricaturist like Hogarth with the controversial spirit of Pope, and with the sturdy independence of the British mob. Such a man was Charles Churchill, the renegade parson, who with John Wilkes began to publish *The North Briton* on June 5, 1762. This was the chief organ of the opposition; for forty-five issues it kept up a steady fire upon Bute, the Scots, and the government.

Wilkes and Churchill, however, had not started the quarrel.

⁹ *The Monthly Review* for July-December, 1756, p. 194.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* for July-December, 1757, pp. 87-8.

Bute upon his appointment as prime minister had been instrumental in founding *The Briton*, which was edited by Tobias Smollett, and *The Auditor*, edited by Arthur Murphy. *The Auditor*¹¹ was too scurrilous and dull to be of much aid to *The Briton*, either in winning popularity for Bute or in destroying the popularity of *The North Briton*. The monthly periodicals were filled with discussion of the papers and of the principles enunciated in them. The numerous letters written to the magazines have little value for our purpose except to show with what bitterness the conflict was waged. They are signed with fictitious names and make of Wilkes either a devil or a god according as they honor Bute or hate him. One or two illustrations will suffice to show their attitude and quality. *The Trinobantian*, No. 2, published in *The London Chronicle*, has the following account of *The North Briton*:

Indeed, a weekly retailer of scriptural and historical fragments, has echoed the word Favourite, as if there was something baneful in the very sound; and has tired our patience with senseless allusions to the stories of Gaveston and Spencer: which may possibly impose on those who are weak enough to be amused with words, but will never influence such as consider circumstances before they make applications.¹²

Another of these writers says, under the name Tickle Pitcher:

I have put to rebuke the petulant flippancy of the North Briton, and have proved him to be a haberdasher of small literature, the publisher of a Chronique Scandaleuse, the conductor of a weekly libel. The reverend half of him I have shewn to be a mere Oldmixon in politicks [sic], diving, among the Naiads of Fleet Ditch, in the mud of scurrility.¹³

Although Wilkes and Churchill were writing in defense of the Opposition, it would seem improbable that the great leaders like Pitt approved of the virulence of *The North Briton's* attack. Pitt condemned the paper as licentious and criminal;¹⁴ Lord Temple, one of Pitt's associates, although undoubtedly cognizant of the management of *The North Briton*, wrote to Wilkes in terms of guarded disapprobation, advising him not to be too severe in his attack:

¹¹ *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1762, pp. 272-3.

¹² *The London Chronicle*, vol. 12, p. 268.

¹³ *The London Magazine* for 1762, p. 591.

I am quite at a loss to guess through what channels the *North Briton* flows, but I suppose it is meant to be a Southern stream productive of good to the public; but I fear the merchandize it bears will be attended with contrary effects, attacking at once the whole nation of Scotland, by wholesale and retail in so very invidious a manner: and Lord B.'s name at full length may be attended with unhappy consequences.¹⁴

Yet *The North Briton* was no more virulent than its rivals—the only difference was that its editors were brilliant enough and bold enough to make their paper interesting. The whole newspaper war was characterized by bitter personalities. On September 28, 1762, Horace Walpole wrote to the Honorable H. S. Conway, "There are satiric prints enough to tapestry Westminster hall,"¹⁵ and on October 29, he sent him a full discussion of the "flower of brimstone, the best things published in this season of outrage":

I should not have waited for orders, if I had met with the least tolerable morsel. But this opposition ran stark mad at once, cursed, swore, called names, and has not been one minute cool enough to have a grain of wit. Their prints are gross, their papers scurrilous; indeed the authors abuse one another more than anybody else. I have not seen a single ballad or epigram. They are as seriously dull as if the controversy was religious. . . . What lectures will be read to poor children on this aera. Europe taught to tremble, the great King humbled, . . . Wilkes as spotless as Sallust, and the Flamen Churchill knocking down the foes of Britain with statues of the Gods.¹⁶

It would be unprofitable to give a detailed account of every issue of *The North Briton*, for that would entail a similar account of the other papers to which the various numbers were frequently addressed. For instance, *The Auditor*, in number XVII, printed a report of a conversation between Wilkes and Lord Bute's young son:

A young gentleman of 12 years old, who is placed for education at Winchester college, and is son to the noble lord in question, being the other day in a bookseller's shop at Winchester, Col. Cataline entered the place, and most liberally and manfully accosted the youth in these words—

¹⁴ *The Grenville Papers: Being the Correspondence of Richard Grenville Earl Temple, K. G., and the Right Hon.: George Grenville, their friends and contemporaries.* Edited, with Notes, by W. J. Smith, Esq. In four volumes. London, 1852, vol. I, p. 457.

¹⁵ Walpole, *Letters*, vol. IV, p. 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

'Young gentleman, your father will have his head cut off—*Sir!*—He will lose his head in less than six months—*For what, sir!*—*I never heard that he had done anything amiss: he has a great many friends,—such as * * **—and * * *—and the Right Hon. George * * * Ay! he is your father's great puppy-dog—but depend upon it your father will lose his head, or the mob shall tear him to pieces.' The youth upon this burst into tears, with indignation, and turning short, as he rushed out of the shop, 'You are a squinting scoundrel,' says he, 'for offering to talk to me in this manner.'

It is practically impossible to determine from internal evidence which papers Churchill wrote. We have a letter, however, which proves that *The North Briton* which contains Wilkes's answer to this charge, was managed by Churchill. The letter is written to —, evidently the publisher. It is dated from Winchester, Monday, October 18, [1762]:

I have at last got the *Auditor*, and I shall send you by next Saturday a letter to the *North Briton*, which is a full justification of myself from the charge of the *boy*. Mr. Churchill undertakes for the next Saturday, but room must be left for a letter of about two pages.

In all events you have a paper with the motto *et cantare pares et respondere parati*.

I am really well pleased with last Saturday's *North Briton*. . . .

I shall not be in town 'till the second week in November: then no more to quit London. Let everything be sent here. I am, Sir, your most humble Servant, John Wilkes.

You may always send to Mr. Churchill, at Mr. Horner's, in Tothill Street, Westminster.

(No direction)

Great George Street.¹⁷

There are two significant details for us to notice in this letter, first, that Churchill had charge of the issue of October 23, 1762, and secondly, that although Wilkes was not to be in town until the second week in November, he directed that everything be sent to him. That is, although Churchill was nominally taking charge of *The North Briton* during those few weeks, Wilkes was in reality running the paper, and writing a great part of it.

On Monday, March 28, 1763, *The London Chronicle* contained a notice that John Wilkes, Member for Aylesbury, set out for France on Saturday (*i. e.*, March 26).¹⁸ On Monday evening, April 11,

¹⁷ *Grenville Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 489-490.

¹⁸ *London Chronicle*, vol. 13, p. 297.

he returned.¹⁹ Hence, in all probability, Churchill had charge for the two weeks, April 2 and April 9.

In a letter written to Wilkes some little time after Wilkes had fought a duel with Lord Talbot, Churchill says, "I have made the N. B. entirely out of your letters,"²⁰ a fact of considerable significance in determining the extent to which Wilkes was the moving spirit in the composition of *The North Briton*. Churchill may have furnished many of the ideas, but he looked always to Wilkes as his leader.

It is interesting to note that in the various accounts of the Wilkes cases there is practically no mention of Churchill. "Wilkes and Liberty" was always the cry of the mob. Churchill had certainly an active share in the production of the paper, but Wilkes, as the owner, was the important figure. Churchill was known widely by his verse, but he was mentioned almost always as the poet, and almost never as the co-editor of *The North Briton*. That he and Wilkes were working in closest harmony is proved by certain letters that have been preserved.

In a volume of Wilkes data in the Sumner collection at Harvard University, is an undated letter from Churchill to Kearsley, the publisher, inquiring about the arrangements for publishing *The North Briton*. Churchill says:

Mr. Wilkes and I are now together, and concerning the N. B. are come to this determination.

We have provided a Printer, who is to send us the Papers in such time that You may have them on Friday at 2 o'clock, and we should be glad to know for a certainty whether You will chose to continue as the Publisher, which will be entirely agreeable to us if it is to You.

I should be glad You would let us know how many You usually print off, and what is the expence of Paper and Printing, so that we may be better judges in what manner to fix the terms with the printer. an answer to this left at Mr. Wilkes any time tonight will oblige

Your very humble Servt _____²¹

In a letter to Wilkes, also undated, Churchill gives him some advice about the contents of *The North Briton*. After mentioning

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

²⁰ *Letters between The Duke of Grafton, . . . etc., and John Wilkes, Esq. With Explanatory Notes.* In two volumes. London, 1769, vol. 1, p. 308.

²¹ *John Wilkes*—in the Sumner Collection of Harvard University, p. 53.

the fact that Wilkes had written the supposed letter from the Pretender to the Earl of Bute, in the issue of February 19, he adds,

Pray finish up the paper against the Tories, which you shewed me. I mean that which has the motto,

Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum
Tendimus in Latium.

I fear the damned Aristocracy is gaining ground in this country.²²

A poem called *Rodondo: or the State Jugglers*, gives Churchill full credit for his efforts against the Scotch. This work was written chiefly to ridicule Pitt, but contains considerable abuse of Wilkes's co-worker:

How cou'd the muse a Scot endure?
The *rich* North Briton calls them poor!
The *wise* North Briton marks them fools,
And *faction's hackney* stamp rhem [stamps them?] tools,
Great Ch——ll swears they're dull and stale,
His paunch replete with beef and ale;
And nodding o'er the twentieth pot,
Hiccups and belches, D—n a Scot.²³

It would seem that *The North Briton* occupied most of Churchill's attention between June, 1762, and January, 1763. With the exception of the third book of his satirical celebration of the Cock Lane Ghost which appeared in September, 1762,²⁴ he did not produce any poetry until January, 1763, when he published *The Prophecy of Famine: a Scots Pastoral, inscribed to John Wilkes, Esq.*²⁵

I

The Prophecy of Famine, with its 562 lines, may be divided roughly into four parts: (1) lines 1-92, an attack on the taste of contemporary poets; (2) lines 93-272, ironical praise of Scotland as a place where the poet takes refuge from modern taste; (3) lines 273-402, a dialogue between Sawney and Jockey, two Scotch lads; (4) lines 403-562, Famine and her prophecy. The motto for the poem is appropriate:

²² *Wilkes Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 326-7.

²³ *The Critical Review*, vol. 15, p. 127.

²⁴ *The London Chronicle*, vol. 12, p. 306.

²⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1763, p. 47.

Nos patriam fugimus. Virgil,

which Churchill translates,

We all get out of our country as fast as we can.

The first part of the poem is an attack upon contemporary taste, meaningless invocations to the muse, artificial pastoral trappings for commonplace English scenes, and, most of all, upon the neglect of the heart and personal feelings implied in the wholesale borrowings of exotic landscapes and conventional descriptive words. Even a country lad, says Churchill, cannot woo a cook-maid without first fitting himself at the sacred mount to sing of nymphs and swains.

After a summary of the faults of the poets of his day, Churchill dedicates himself to Nature as the goddess whom he will follow in his poetry. By *Nature* he means simply the normal, the natural order of things, the antithesis of artificial. He then makes the astonishing statement that he will go to Scotland where everything is natural:

By Nature's charms (inglorious truth!) subdued,
However plain her dress, and 'haviour rude,
To northern climes my happier course I steer,
Climes where the goddess reigns throughout the year. . . .²⁶

With this transition which is so awkward as to suggest that the first part of the poem was not intended to be a part of the whole, Churchill begins a mock encomium of Scotland, and of the benefits which England derives from her—

What wagon-loads of courage, wealth, and sense,
Doth each revolving day import from thence?
To us she gives, disinterested friend!
Faith without fraud, and Stuarts without end.²⁷

In the third part of the poem the satirist parodies Act I, Scene 1, of Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*. The situation in the early part of *The Gentle Shepherd* is as follows: Patie, the Gentle Shepherd, is in love with Peggy, the supposed niece of Glauf, an old shepherd. Roger, Patie's friend, is in love with Jenny, Glauf's only daughter. In Act I, Scene 1, Roger and Patie discuss their loves. Churchill has taken the characters as outlined in the

²⁶ *The Prophecy of Famine*, ll. 105-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 113-116.

prologue and has adapted them to his purpose. Hence in *The Prophecy of Famine* we find an incidental parody of *The Gentle Shepherd* and direct satire on Scotch pride and poverty.

A prologue preceding the first scene in *The Gentle Shepherd* gives the setting and the characters:

Beneath the south side of a craigy bield
Where crystal springs their halesome waters yield,
Twa youthfu' shepherds on the gowans lay,
Tenting their flocks ae bonny morn of May.
Poor Roger granes, 'till hollow echoes ring:
But blyther Patie likes to laugh and sing.²⁸

Churchill transfers the characteristics of these two youths to his heroes, Sawney, the pessimist, and Jockey, the optimist. He does not attempt to imitate all the details of the conversation, for his purpose is not to write a play like *The Gentle Shepherd*, but merely to have a means of attacking Scotland through the ironical utterances of her own children.

Sawney and Jockey take refuge from the rigors of the northern climate in the cave of Famine which Churchill adorns with all the horrors that infest a loathsome and hunger-stricken land. Sheltered here, the two boys talk together about their lives, their loves, and their country. They lament the evils that the rebellion had brought with it, the loss of family and friends on battlefield or gibbet. At this point, Churchill drops the parody on *The Gentle Shepherd*, and makes Famine, addressing the boys, curse the land of their birth, and prophesy the glory that will come to them at the expense of the English. She sketches out the history of Scotland, full of countless deeds of treachery that England might well remember, but will soon forget. England will fall into a snare:

Already is this game of fate begun
Under the sanction of my darling son.²⁹

This "darling son," is, of course, Lord Bute, who brings discord into the land under the guise of peace. The English will be deceived into giving honors to the former adherents of the Stuarts,

²⁸ *The Gentle Shepherd, A Scots Pastoral Comedy*, as written by Allan Ramsay, London, 1796 (Bell's British Theatre, vol. 25, p. 13).

²⁹ *The Prophecy of Famine*, II. 531-2.

who, however loyal they may seem to be, are, nevertheless, traitors at heart.

A satire so virulent, so abusive, naturally makes one wonder whether it was in any way justifiable—whether it was an outburst of righteous indignation or whether it was merely the outpouring of political spite. Lord Bute's policy toward Prussia, England's ally, and toward France, her enemy, was treacherous and weak. He had given many important posts in his government to Scotchmen, who were usually shrewd and able managers. In the English people there had been toward the Scotch from time immemorial, a deep-rooted enmity which was inflamed anew both by the conduct of the minister and by the influx of Scotchmen to London.

The Prophecy of Famine was a product of the same spirit of enmity—its wild and general condemnation of the Scots, its caricature of the true conditions, were characteristics that would appeal to the masses—who were the only group that could be influenced by such appeals. We must not forget that Churchill was from the common people himself, and that his was a nature capable of working itself up to a high pitch of excitement at the words of a demagogue. That demagogue was Wilkes; from the fact that in Churchill's first three poems there was originally little or no reference to the Scotch, we may assume that *The Prophecy of Famine* was largely the result of Wilkes's influence upon his mind. Wilkes hated the Scotch bitterly for political reasons; Churchill hated them mildly and admired Wilkes. His own words betray his attitude:

Think not that the Scottish eclogue totally stands still, or that I can ever be unmindful of any thing, which I think will give *Wilkes* pleasure, and which I am certain will do me honour in having his name prefix'd.³⁰

Churchill hated the Scotch, but his hatred would not have been so virulent had he not been under the spell of the greatest demagogue of his time.

This is the only one of Churchill's political poems that did not grow out of a definite injury to Wilkes. It was written during the same period as *The North Briton* and may be considered the poetical counterpart of it. It is also the only political poem that

³⁰ *Wilkes Correspondence*: Letter from Churchill to Wilkes, vol. I, p. 306.

Churchill wrote without haste. The later political satires were struck off at white heat—this, in the poet's leisure moments.³¹

The Prophecy of Famine was the inspiration of a number of lesser authors who tried to imitate Churchill. I shall list a few of their works:

1. *The Prophecy of Genius*. Of this *The Monthly Review* says, it "abuses Churchill for being abusive."³²

³¹ It would seem that the first plan of *The Prophecy of Famine* was somewhat different from that of the finished poem. Churchill describes it as follows in a letter to Wilkes. He is speaking of "the Scottish Eclogue": "The present state of it however stands thus—it is split into two poems—the Scottish Eclogue, which will be inscribed to you in the pastoral way—and another poem—which I think will be a strong one—immediately addressed by way of epistle to you—this way they will both be of a piece, otherwise it wou'd have been,

Delphinum silvis appingit, fluctibus aprum.

The pastoral begins thus—and I believe will be out soon—but nothing comes out till I begin to be pleas'd with it myself,

When Cupid first instructs, &c., &c.

The other runs thus,

From solemn thought, &c., &c.

Can Wilkes?—I know thou canst—retreat a while

Learn pity's lesson, and disdain to smile.

Oft have I heard thee, &c., &c.

Hirco—the Moral *Hirco*—stains the bed

Of that kind Master, who first gave him bread," etc.

The line quoted "When Cupid first instructs, &c., &c.," is the opening line of *The Prophecy of Famine*,

"When Cupid first instructs his darts to fly."

The second quotation, "From solemn thought, &c., &c.," begins in *The Prophecy of Famine* at line 149, with the succeeding lines changed from

"Can Wilkes?—I know thou canst—retreat a while,

Learn pity's lesson, and disdain to smile,"

to the following:

"At Friendship's summons will my Wilkes retreat

And see, once seen before, that ancient seat,

That ancient seat, where majesty display'd

Her ensign, long before the world was made!"

(*Prophecy of Famine*, ll. 159-162.)

The passage about *Hirco*, Churchill does not use at all in this poem, but inserts it in his satire, *The Conference*, l. 55 ff.

³² *The Monthly Review*, vol. 28, p. 321.

2. *Genius and Valour, a Scotch Pastoral*, a defense of Scotland by an Englishman. *The Monthly Review* received it favorably as a contrast to Churchill's bitter attack, and complimented the author upon the "easy and harmonious flow of his versification."³³

3. *The Prophecy of Famine, Part II.*³⁴ This did not win such favorable treatment:

If Mr. Churchill's poetry needed a foil to set it off to the highest advantage, this anonymous supplement to his celebrated *Scots Pastoral*, would answer the purpose, to the utmost of his wishes.³⁵

One can find ample justification for such censure in lines like the following:

Two cabalistic words the rest excell,
This privilege is call'd and that libel.
These words obscure who labours to explain,
Like one who wash'd a negro, strives in vain.³⁶

4. *The Jumble*; a Satire, Addressed to the Revd. Mr. Churchill. This is rather a general criticism of Churchill and of the reviewers than a direct result of *The Prophecy of Famine*. It may be included here, however, because much of its contemptible verse deals with the Scotch. It says that a whole nation should not suffer for one man.

5. *The Rural Conference, A Pastoral . . . Inscribed to Mr. C. Churchill*. The dedication is couched in the most fulsome terms:

To Mr. Churchill,

Sir,

Permit me to lay at the feet of the first of Patriots, a few sheets, of which the greatest, and perhaps, only merit, consists in their warmth for the best of men, and against the worst of the whole race of mortals. . . . The name of Churchill is not only an ornament to any page, as the favourite of the Muses, but a dignity, as term synonymous [sic] to that of Patriot.³⁷

There follows a commonplace pastoral in the course of which

³³ *The Monthly Review*, vol. 28, p. 398.

³⁴ *The Prophecy of Famine: A Scots Pastoral. Part the Second*, Inscribed to C. Churchill, London, 1763.

³⁵ *The Monthly Review*, vol. 28, p. 488.

³⁶ *The Prophecy of Famine, . . . Part the Second*, p. 25.

³⁷ *The Rural Conference, A Pastoral . . . Dedication*, p. 1.

Daphnis, a young shepherd, quotes the lament of an old shepherd concerning the evils of the time:

The land, O Daphnis! is in parties cut,
From cloud-cap'd mansions, to the clay-built hut.³⁸

After a hundred lines of this twaddle, Daphnis calls solemnly upon heaven to damn to Scotland the author of the nation's ill,

O drive the monster to his native clime,
There let him expiate his horrid crime:
In that accursed land to undergo,
His series of hereditary woe.³⁹

Such rubbish even in brief quotation shows Churchill's great superiority to most of his fellow-writers. It is necessary to remember, however, that men like Johnson, Gray, and Goldsmith did not condescend to soil their hands in the political mire in which Churchill's opponents usually worked. Churchill was a sun among the lesser planets, but he was not among the brightest suns.

None of the petty replies shows the hand of a master. The dedication, just quoted, with its obsequious flattery, was written by no means in order to praise Churchill, but simply to sell the work. The name Churchill had become, by this time a synonym for sensational, half-libelous writing, and whatever bore this name aroused the curiosity of the public. Only the lesser writers would enter the controversy, and since they lacked any literary power themselves, their only hope was to catch the attention of the public by associating their work with that of a greater man. "Whoever did not know the blind rage and senselessness of party, would be amazed at any one's daring to take the people of England for worse than Hottentots, in offering to the foul-feeding and swallow of their credulity such wretched garbage."⁴⁰

This opinion of one who signs himself *A Briton*, is likely to meet the approval of any modern reader who attempts to wade through the writings of Churchill's imitators. They could imitate his abuse, but had neither the wit nor the vigor to imitate his style.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 253-4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 396-9.

⁴⁰ *The London Magazine* for 1764, p. 525.

II

The next of Churchill's political satires, *The Epistle to William Hogarth*, was published in July, 1763,⁴¹ as the result of a long series of events which had embroiled Churchill and Wilkes with the most distinguished caricaturist and realistic painter of the day. In origin, the quarrel was political. Hogarth was one of the pensioners of Lord Bute, employed by him to defend the administration. This fact alone was sufficient to damn him in the eyes of Wilkes and Churchill, but he aroused their anger still more by publishing, in spite of Wilkes's protest, a print called *The Times*. It appeared in September, 1762, labelled No. 1, as though it were to be the first of a series. "Europe was represented in a conflagration, and the flames were already communicating to Great Britain. Pitt was blowing the fire, which Lord Bute, with a party of soldiers and sailors, assisted by Highlanders, was endeavoring to extinguish, but he was impeded in his design by the Duke of Newcastle, who brought a barrow-full of *Monitors* and *North Britons* to feed the flames."⁴²

The Saturday after the publication of *The Times*, Wilkes printed in *The North Briton*, number seventeen, a very bitter diatribe against Hogarth, which furnished many ideas for Churchill's *Epistle*. Wilkes attacks him not only for *The Times* but also for his painting, *Sigismunda*. Of the latter he says:

If the figure had a resemblance of any thing ever on earth or had the least pretence to meaning or expression, it was what he had seen, or perhaps made, in real life, his own wife in an agony of passion: but of what passion no connoisseur could guess. . . . The darling passion of Mr. *Hogarth* is to show the faulty and dark side of every object. He never gives us in perfection the *fair face of nature*, but admirably well holds out her deformities to ridicule. The reason is plain. All objects are painted on his *retina* in a grotesque manner, and he has never felt the force of what the French call *la belle nature*. . . . He has succeeded very happily in the way of humour, and has miscarried in every other attempt. This has arose in some measure from his head, but much more from his heart.⁴³

⁴¹ Wright, T. *Caricature History of the Georges* . . . London, 1868, pp. 264 ff.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴³ *The North Briton*. Two volumes. London, 1763, vol. I, pp. 154-6.

Wilkes charges that Hogarth's heart is bad, that his genius is waning, that he borrows ideas from others, that *The Times* is devoid of *original* merit. He then writes the passage that contains most of the ideas that Churchill later uses in his *Epistle*. It is, of course, quite conceivable that Churchill suggested the details of this article or even wrote it:

I own too that I am grieved to see the genius of Hogarth, which should take in all ages and countries, sunk to a level with the miserable tribe of party etchers, and now, in his rapid decline, entering into the poor politics of the faction of the day, and descending to low personal abuse, instead of instructing the world, as he could once, by manly moral satire. Whence can proceed so surprizing [sic] a change? Is it the forwardness of old age? or is it that envy and impatience of resplendent merit in every way, at which he has always sickened? How often has he been remarked to droop at the fair and honest applause given even to a friend, tho he had particular obligations to the very same gentleman? What wonder then that some of the most respectable characters of the age become the objects of his ridicule? It is sufficient that the rest of mankind applaud: from that moment he begins the attack, and you never can be well with him, till he hears an universal outcry against you, and till all your friends have given you up. . . . The public never had the least share of *Hogarth's* regard, or even good-will. *Gain* and *vanity* have steered his little light bark quite thro' life. He has never been consistent but with respect to those two principles. . . . his insufferable vanity will never allow the least merit in another, and no man of a liberal turn of mind will ever condescend to feed his pride with the gross and fulsome praise he expects, or to burn the incense he claims, and indeed snuff like a most gracious God. To this he joins no small share of jealousy; in consequence of which he has all his life endeavoured to suppress rising merit, and has been very expert in every mean underhand endeavour, to extinguish the least spark of genuine fire."

It was nearly a year before Hogarth had an opportunity to retaliate. Wilkes in the meantime had continued to publish *The North Briton* until he printed Number 45, in which he over-reached himself by attacking the king himself. For this act he was arrested by general warrant and imprisoned in the Tower. On May 3, he appeared before the Court of Common Pleas, and on the 6th, Justice Pratt decided that his privilege as a member of parliament extended to all offences except treason, felony, and breach of the peace. He was therefore set free, and, amid shouts of applause, went home accompanied by the crowd. At the second appearance of Wilkes in Westminster Hall before Justice Pratt, Hogarth drew

"*The North Briton*, vol. 1, pp. 157-9.

the demoniacal sketch that has made Wilkes known for all time as "Squinting Jack."⁴⁵ Churchill was also present, and hastened, in *The Epistle to William Hogarth*, to attack the assailant of his friend.

The poem contains 654 lines, the first 308 of which are an indirect attack upon Hogarth, and the remaining lines, direct invective. The first portion consists of a dialogue between the poet and Candour, in which the poet paints a very gloomy picture of the times. He assails the excise, the Scotch, and the leaders of the administration. Candour accuses him of falsehood; she insists that no monster could be found whose guilt could equal that which he attributed to all; she challenges him to find even one man whose evil doings would justify such an attack. The poet answers with one word: Hogarth.

Then in a rush of contemptuous words he bids his victim come to the judgment. With all the brutality of a Jeffreys he brings charge upon charge against him—of envy of those who win fame, of spite against Wilkes, the savior of his country. On the day when the very principles of English liberty were at stake, and Wilkes was on trial, Hogarth was at his deadly work:

Lurking, most ruffian-like, behind the screen
So placed all things to see, himself unseen.⁴⁶

The baseness of the man contrasts with his acknowledged supremacy as an artist—and his fall is the more pitiable because of his greatness.

The final lines in the Epistle, although the least justifiable in the poem, are among the finest Churchill ever wrote. In them he rises to splendid heights of satiric verse as he describes the pathos and the tragedy of an old age like that of Swift and Steele, the premature night that settles first upon the mind:

What bitter pangs must humble genius feel,
In their last hours, to view a Swift and Steele!
How must ill-boding horrors fill her breast
When she beholds men mark'd above the rest
For qualities most dear, plunged from that height,
And sunk, deep sunk, in second childhood's night;

⁴⁵ Cf. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 269 for this caricature.

⁴⁶ *The Epistle to William Hogarth*, ll. 409-410.

Are men, indeed, such things, and are the best
 More subject to this evil than the rest,
 To drivel out whole years of idiot breath,
 And sit the monuments of living death!
 O, galling circumstance to human pride!
 Abasing thought, but not to be denied.
 With curious art the brain, too finely wrought,
 Preys on herself, and is destroy'd by thought.
 Constant attention wears the active mind,
 Blots out our powers, and leaves a blank behind.
 But let not youth, to insolence allied,
 In heat of blood, in full career of pride,
 Possess'd of genius, with unhallow'd rage
 Mock the infirmities of reverend age:
 The greatest genius to this fate may bow;
 Reynolds, in time, may be like Hogarth now.*

With these magnificently satiric lines the poem closes, and we are left with the picture of Hogarth in our minds—old and feeble, a wreck of his former self, worsted in a contest from which his years should have deterred him. His offence, however, did not warrant the punishment. He was a follower of Bute; he had published a political print against Pitt; he had drawn a caricature of Wilkes, which, although highly uncomplimentary, was no whit worse than most of the other cartoons of the day. It would seem that Wilkes was the first to begin personalities, and Churchill's verbal caricature of the old man is both unworthy of him and entirely uncalled-for. The quarrel was political; the fact that Hogarth had been formerly a friend of both Wilkes and Churchill, gave them still less excuse for directing personal abuse upon him.

Yet Hogarth, in spite of his age, was by no means an idiot incapable of giving Churchill as good as he had given. The attack by Wilkes and Churchill, inspired by politics, had degenerated into personalities; Hogarth's reply was a print called "The Bruiser, C. Churchill, (once the Rev.,) in the character of a Russian Hercules, regaling himself after having killed the monster Caricatura, that so severely galled his virtuous friend, the heaven-born Wilkes."⁴⁸

The print represents Churchill as a bear with parson's bands. In one hand he holds a pot of porter, and in the other a knotty club on which every knot is labelled — "Lie 1.," "lie 2.," etc. Hogarth's dog is treating the Epistle with great disrespect. In a

* *Ibid.*, ll. 633-654.

⁴⁸ Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

second edition of the print, Hogarth represents himself as a bear-master with a whip, forcing Churchill, the bear, and Wilkes, the monkey, to dance. The monkey is holding a *North Briton* in one hand.⁴⁹

This controversy made Hogarth the object of many caricatures which ridiculed him especially as the defender of Lord Bute. One, *The Bruiser Triumphant*, portrays "Hogarth as an ass, painting the Bruiser, while Wilkes comes behind, and places horns on his head—an allusion to some scandalous intimations in *The North Briton*. Churchill, in the garb of a parson, is writing Hogarth's life."⁵⁰ In another sketch, "Pug the snarling cur" is receiving severe punishment from Wilkes and Churchill.⁵¹

The warfare was by no means confined to caricatures, however, for a number of third-rate writers sprang up to imitate Churchill. I shall list the more important of their works:

1. *Pug's Reply to Parson Bruin. Or, a Polemical Conference occasioned by an Epistle to William Hogarth, Esq. by C. Churchill.*

It contains a pert and insipid dialogue supposed to pass between a dog and a bear, or, as the author calls them, *Serjeant Pug* and *Parson Bruin*; with a print of them by way of frontispiece.⁵²

2. *Churchill's Epistle to William Hogarth, Esq. Re-versified.* . . . With Notes, is Churchill's poem with a new third line added to every couplet. Neither these lines nor the notes to the poem show even a glimmering of humor. We can get from the following extract an idea of the literary merit of the inserted lines:

And Charley Ch——ll like a puppet squeaks.
 Poor Sigismunda.

 Profanely nick-nam'd by a damn'd divine.

 As sure as Abel was the son of Eve.⁵³

3. *The Group: composed of the most shocking Figures, though the greatest in the Nation, painted in an Elegy on the saddest Subjects, the living, the dead, and the damned: such as Hogarth,*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *The Critical Review*, vol. 16, pp. 70-1.

⁵³ *Churchill's Epistle to William Hogarth, Esq. Re-versified. With Notes.* London, 1763, ll. 729, 732, 735.

Dishonourable Right Honourable, &c. &c. &c. Inscribed to John Wilkes (who is above Title) and Charles Churchill. By Salvator Rosa, or rather the real Friend of Mr. Wilkes.

In the sixth page of this heap of ribaldry, [the author] has the most audacious impudence to compare Wilkes to the Saviour of the world! ⁵⁴

4. *Liberty in the Suds: or Modern Characters.* In a Letter to a Friend. By Theophilus Hogarth, Gent. *The Critical Review* comments,

[He] abuses the great for insincerity, Churchill for impudence, and couples him and Wilkes together, in exposing them, like bear and monkey, to the ridicule of the public.⁵⁵

5. The Snarling Pug and Dancing Bear. A Fable Addressed to Messrs. Hogarth and Churchill. Three old maids, Taste, Fashion, and Party, have a number of pets, among them a pug-dog and a bear. Bruin is Churchill:

Rough Bruin, but as yet a cub
Unlick'd, and yet unwean'd from bub
Was boarded with a neighbouring vicar,
And nurtur'd with his fav'rite liquor.
Hence, growing sturdy and mischievous,
He oft committed outrage grievous; . . .⁵⁶

Such was the controversy between the greatest caricaturist of the age and its great and little satirists. Although *The Epistle* contains some good poetry and excellent satire, its severity was scarcely merited by Hogarth's offence. The personal bitterness was unjustifiable. Over a year later, in his poem, *Independence*, Churchill wrote a couplet which hinted that Hogarth had already died—presumably killed by *The Epistle*. He is speaking about himself as a poet:

Hogarth would draw him (Envy must allow)
E'en to the life, was Hogarth living now.⁵⁷

A few weeks after the publication of *Independence*, Hogarth was dead, and in less than a month later, Churchill followed him.

⁵⁴ *The Monthly Review*, vol. 29, p. 468.

⁵⁵ *The Critical Review*, vol. 17, p. 239.

⁵⁶ *The Annual Register* for 1763, pp. 232-236.

⁵⁷ Churchill, *Independence*, ll. 177-8.

III

From the time of Wilkes's release in May, 1763, until November of the same year there was very little literary activity on Churchill's part. Wilkes, by his attacks on Bute and the ministerial party, had become the idol of the populace.⁵⁸ All through the summer the newspapers were filled with letters arguing his case. Meanwhile,

"A curious tract parodying the church service shows to what extent some of Wilkes's admirers were willing to go. It did not appear until 1768 (*Monthly Review*, vol. 38, p. 505) but is entirely typical of the Wilkes-worshipping spirit rampant at the period we are considering:

"Britannia's Intercession, for the Deliverance of John Wilkes, Esq. from Persecution and Banishment. To which is added, a political and constitutional Sermon: and a Dedication to L * * * B * * *. London. . . ."

At the beginning of this intercession, the orator shall pronounce, with an audible voice, one of these passages

When B * * * turneth from the error of his way, and doeth that which is seemly and good, he shall wear his plaid in peace.—*Scots Journ.*

To Wilkes belonged freedom and greatness of spirit, though many have devised against him, and complied not with the words of his mouth.

—*North Briton.*

Through the spirit of Wilkes we are yet in the land of freedom, because his exertion in that point faileth not.—*Polit. Regist.*

Give thanks, O ye people, give thanks unto Wilkes, for he is mighty amongst us.—*Let. to H—y.*

O let the wickedness of a favourite come to an end, but establish the upright and free-born.—*No. 45.*

We waited patiently for Wilkes, and he came unto us, and he heard our moan.—*Gaz.*

Then follows the service, substituting Wilkes for God—one example will suffice:

"The N * * * * B * * * * is his, and he made it, his head prepared the matter thereof: . . . As thou wert in the beginning thou art now, and ever will be, liberty without end. Amen."

The Wilkonian creed is substituted for that of the Apostles:

"I believe in Wilkes, the firm patriot, maker of number 45. Who was born for our good. Suffered under arbitrary power. Was banished and imprisoned. He descended into purgatory, and returned soon after. He ascended here with honour, and sitteth amidst the great assembly of the people, where he shall judge both the favourite and his creatures. I believe in the spirit of his abilities, that they will prove to the good of our country. In the resurrection of liberty, and the life of universal freedom for ever. Amen." (John Wilkes volume in Sumner Collection of Harvard University Library.)

the leaders of the administration were not idle. Balked of their prey by the decision of Justice Pratt that Wilkes's arrest was a breach of parliamentary privilege, they set about securing his downfall by other means.

After the publication of *The North Briton* No. 45, and Wilkes's consequent tilt with the king's ministers, there was so much interest in the publication that Wilkes felt he would be justified in republishing it in book-form. He, therefore, although against the advice of Lord Temple, had the first forty-five numbers of *The North Briton* reprinted, with Williams as publisher. On his private press he had printed *The Essay on Woman*, an obscene parody of Pope's *Essay on Man*, and also a parody on the *Veni Creator*. Of the *Essay on Woman* he printed only thirteen copies, one of which, unfortunately for Wilkes, his enemies were able to get from a man employed by him. The work was dedicated to a courtesan, Fanny Murray, and contained notes ascribed to Bishop Warburton, and an appendix of blasphemies. The author was probably Thomas Potter.⁵⁹

After the publication of *The North Briton*, Number 45, Wilkes

⁵⁹ *The Papers of a Critic, Selected from the Writings of the late Charles Wentworth Dilke. With a Biographical Sketch by his grandson, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke.* In two volumes. London, 1875, vol. II, pp. 264 ff. There is a manuscript of a poem of the same title but not by Wilkes or Potter in the British Museum (Addit. ms. 30887). This lacks both dedication and notes. It begins with the words, "'Awake, my Sandwich,' and is in fact entirely distinct from the poem inscribed to Fanny Murray, of which one of the few extant exemplars, beginning with the words 'Awake, my Fanny,' is in the Dyce Library at the South Kensington Museum." (*D. N. B.* article by J. M. Rigg, on John Wilkes.) The spurious piece was printed under Wilkes's name and not denied by him. Still another spurious piece is ascribed on the title-page to "J. W. Senator" (in the Epilogue "Julio Manlovi, Senator of Lucca."). This appeared in London in 1763, 4to. In the library of the University of Pennsylvania is a collection of Wilkes's works containing *An Essay on Women* and other works too coarse for general circulation. It is entitled,

"*An Essay on Woman and other Pieces printed at the private press in Great George Street, Westminster, in 1763, and now reproduced in facsimile from a copy believed to be unique. To which are added Epigrams and Miscellaneous Poems Now First Collected By the Right Hon. John Wilkes M. P. for Aylesbury, and afterwards Lord Mayor of London, etc.—London. Privately printed September, 1771. This also may be an imposture, but it corresponds to the account given in D. N. B. quoted above.*"

went to France. On September 28, he returned to England, and on November 12, published *The North Briton*, No. 46. On November 15, at the opening of Parliament, the administration answered his challenge. Wilkes was present as member from Aylesbury, and, in the House of Commons, tried to protest against the breach of his privilege in the affair of *The North Briton*. The king's friends were prepared, however, and Grenville forestalled him with a royal message that contained a full account of all the proceedings against Wilkes.

The question was discussed at great length. It involved not merely *The North Briton*, but also parliamentary privilege and personal freedom of speech. Wilkes had criticized the administration freely, and now, with its hired majority in the House of Commons, it was able to retaliate. It ordered that *The North Briton* No. 45 should be burned by the hangman, as a false and seditious libel.

Meanwhile, the House of Lords was not idle. Sandwich, who had obtained a copy of *The Essay on Woman*, began reading it aloud to his fellow-peers; on his motion they considered the ascribing of the notes to Bishop Warburton a breach of that gentleman's privilege. They assumed that Wilkes was the author and ordered that he be prosecuted by the Attorney-General in the Court of King's Bench for printing and publishing an impious libel. The carrying out of this sentence, however, was interfered with by the duel with Martin.

Samuel Martin, formerly Secretary to the Treasury, had nourished an enmity against Wilkes ever since March 5, when *The North Briton*, No. 40, had called him "the most treacherous, base, selfish, mean, abject, low lived and dirty fellow, that ever wriggled himself into a secretaryship."⁶⁰

On November 15, Martin joined the other Wilkes-baiters, and mentioning *The North Briton*, said, "Whoever stabs a reputation in the dark, without setting his name, is a cowardly, malignant, and scandalous scoundrel."⁶¹ Looking at Wilkes, he repeated this twice. Wilkes wrote to him avowing the authorship of the offending paper, and asking whether Martin had intended the words

⁶⁰ *The North Briton*, vol. II, pp. 174-5.

⁶¹ Walpole, *Letters*, vol. IV, p. 125.

cowardly scoundrel for him.⁶² Martin replied that he had, and challenged him to a duel. He fought Wilkes with pistols in Hyde Park, at a distance of fourteen yards. The first shots missed their mark, but with his second shot, Martin wounded his opponent in the abdomen. Wilkes told Martin that he would not say anything against him, and that he should get away into safety. The wound, although serious enough to prevent Wilkes's attending the sessions of Parliament, did not cause his death. At Christmas time he went to Paris. This duel furnished the occasion for Churchill's next satire, *The Duellist*.

The Duellist,⁶³ written in octosyllabic verse, is divided into three books, which vary in length: the first contains 249 lines, the second, 294, and the third, 474. In the first book the poet gives us the general setting of the action: it is midnight; in the second book he becomes more specific—he takes us to the temple of Liberty; in the third, he shows us the actual scene of the conspiracy against Wilkes, a cave beneath the temple.

In describing the night of the conspiracy, Churchill uses all the stock-figures attendant upon nights in which evil deeds are planned, the owl, ghosts, thunder, and lightning. In addition to numberless unnamed ghosts he brings forward the friends of Liberty in olden times, Hampden and Sir Philip Sidney, to mourn for their patriot brother, Wilkes:

Old Time himself, his scythe thrown by,
Himself lost in eternity,
An everlasting crown shall twine
To make a Wilkes and Sidney join.⁶⁴

In contrast to the praise given to Wilkes is the curse directed against Martin, in which the attack is veiled by the indirect method. The poet can think of no more adequate curse for the most evil assassin than this:

May he—O for a noble curse
Which might his very marrow pierce—

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁶³ The exact date of its publication is obscured by the fact that although *The Monthly Review* mentions it in the Appendix to volume 29 (July-December, 1763, p. 531), *The London Chronicle* for January 21-24, 1764, advertises it as just published. (*London Chronicle*, vol. 15, p. 74).

⁶⁴ *The Duellist*, I, ll. 207-210.

The general contempt engage,
And be the Martin of his age.⁶⁵

Book II has for its general subject, the Temple of Liberty, which represents allegorically the British constitution. Churchill notes with concern its unsound pillars and tottering roof; he laments the patches with which unworthy men have tried to repair it. Various distinguished builders had examined it, but did not know whether it would be better to tear it down altogether or whether, if they tried to improve its condition, they would simply hasten its decay. The golden age with its simple virtues has past away; the lovers of freedom have perished.

Now, into this strange medley of allegory and fact, the satirist introduces a printing-press, the throne of Liberty, Liberty herself, and around her a statue-like group of Courage, Honour, Peace, War, Justice, Mercy, Health, and Virtue. This is one of Churchill's few unintentionally ludicrous situations: an allegorized Temple of Liberty—which is certainly not Wilkes's house in Great George Street—and in it a model printing-press!

But times have changed: the Temple of Liberty is ruined, and her friends are disgraced. Liberty is hooted at wherever she goes, and her place is taken by the king's messengers. The printers rush away, and their persecutors set their mark upon the books that are left behind. Statecraft takes her place on the throne which Liberty has left.

The third book of *The Duellist* is concerned with the actual conspiracy, or at least with Churchill's idea of it. The scene is laid in a cave beneath the temple, a place of labyrinths and mazes where only one passage leads to the secret cell of Fraud. There the treacherous goddess prepares the snares by which men fall, the stars and garters that

Forbid a freeman to be free.⁶⁶

In this subterranean hiding-place, three conspirators plan the fate of Wilkes. The remainder of the poem is taken up largely by character-sketches of these three, William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, Sir Fletcher Norton, and Sandwich.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 245-8.

⁶⁶ *The Duellist*, Bk. III, l. 40.

The overdrawn sketch of the Bishop of Gloucester is the most severe of the three. Warburton was a scholar of wide reputation and broad culture, hated by many for his pugnacity, but by no means the monster whom Churchill portrays. The main reason for the attack was that when the question of *The Essay on Woman* came up in Parliament, Warburton, at Sandwich's request, made one or two speeches. One extract will serve to indicate the tone of the whole: the bishop was so proud,

that should he meet
The twelve Apostles in the street,
He'd turn his nose up at them all,
And shove his Saviour from the wall;⁶⁷

The three conspirators rack their brains to find a scheme by which they can rid themselves of Wilkes, the disturber of their plans. Finally, Fraud comes forth from her hiding-place, and says that her youngest born will destroy the foe. Straightway Martin the duellist steps forth, clad in armor, ready for the attack upon Wilkes.

The Duellist was one of the few of Churchill's works that did not produce a number of imitations or replies. This is due in all probability both to the favor with which the people looked upon Wilkes and to the fear which his treatment by the government inspired in them. About this time, however, appear notices of a few poems evidently influenced by his writings as a whole. One of these is *The Patriot Poet, a Satire. Inscribed to the Reverend Mr. Ch——ll. By a Country Curate*. The author thus describes Churchill's style:

—thou, sonorous Ch—, teach my line
To flow exuberantly wild like thine:
Teach me to twist a thought a thousand ways,
And string with idle particles my lays:
That, one poor sentiment exhausted, *when*
The weary reader hopes a respite, *then*
I may spring on with force redoubled, *till*
I break him panting breathless to my will:
And make him, tir'd in periods of a mile,
Gape in deep wonder at my rapid stile.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 129-132.

⁶⁸ *The Critical Review*, vol. 17, p. 315.

In *The Duellist*, there are practically no passages which might be quoted merely for their poetical power. This, however, is natural in a poem intended absolutely as a polemic. Wrath may raise a poet to heights of righteous indignation or it may lower him to lampoon. It had the latter effect upon Churchill. His verse in *The Duellist* caricatures too freely: his villains, losing their personality, become mere burlesque figures. In the third book, especially, he forgets poetry in his overwhelming desire to lash the man who had injured Wilkes.

Elaborate allegory is not suitable for invective. The satirist is forced to drop it whenever he wishes to be particularly severe, and this produces a ludicrous effect—one cannot with impunity place a printing-press in the temple of Liberty! His poem would have been far better unified had he reduced it to one longer book dealing with the conspiracy. As it is, we have a medley, a series of details strung loosely together to lead up to the appearance of the duellist. Three shifts of scene are too many for a short poem. We should not have to wander in a dark night to a temple of Liberty, and then descend to a cave before we discover Martin. Churchill had the material for an allegorical poem on liberty and a satiric poem on the duel. By trying to combine the two he failed to produce any unified effect. We forget the first two books because they are not closely knit with the account of the conspiracy.

Boldness and vigor are the chief merits of the poem. It expressed the indignation pent up in many hearts against the ministerial tyranny that had oppressed free speech. Many who felt that Wilkes had been too lavish in his abuse of the party in power, were eager to condemn the methods by which his enemies brought about his downfall. The people dared even to express their disapproval to the king. Walpole writes on December 29, 1763, to the Earl of Hertford:

The last time the King was at Drury-lane, the play given out for the next night was 'All in the Wrong': the galleries clapped, and then cried out, 'Let *us* be all in the right! Wilkes and Liberty!' When the King comes to a theatre, or goes out, or goes to the House, there is not a single applause; to the Queen there is a little: in short, *Louis le bienaimé* is not French at present for King George.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Walpole, *Letters*, vol. IV, p. 154.

It was this spirit that Churchill expressed: aside from its literary value, his verse has a very definite importance in interpreting the life of the time. There is no better commentary upon the condition of politics in 1763 than *The Prophecy of Famine* or *The Epistle to William Hogarth*. On the other hand, the only way to appreciate Churchill is to know him in his surroundings and to know the men of his age. The great poems of the world may be studied apart from their authors, and have a universal appeal. We can understand their meaning better, perhaps, by interpreting them as the records of a life or of a century, but they are intelligible in themselves as an exposition of the meaning of existence. But to judge Churchill aright we must know the London of 1760-1765; we must watch the rising spirit of the people; we must, with them, view with apprehension the attitude of the king; we, too, must take sides and enter the conflict at the shoulder of this burly priest, who, in spite of his faults, was a true lover of liberty.

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